

Time to Face up to the Growing Teacher Shortage in North Carolina

**prepared by the Central Carolina RESA
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It's critical that the State Board of Education, Governor, General Assembly and other decisionmakers recognize that North Carolina is facing an increasingly critical shortage of quality teachers to serve an expanding population of students. They must begin to take steps to make this state more attractive, rather than less attractive, to prospective teachers and certified teachers from other states in order to expand the pool of teachers from which our schools can select the best candidates. Last August, newspapers across North Carolina were filled with articles about local school districts that were facing an unusually high number of vacancies to start the school year. Even some of our highest paying school districts had trouble filling elementary classroom teaching positions as well as traditionally hard to fill positions in special education, math, science, and English as a Second Language. Among the 18 districts in the Central Carolina RESA, there were 448 teacher vacancies when school opened, including an unprecedented 107 elementary vacancies, as well as 115 exceptional children (EC), 54 math and 25 science teacher vacancies. As districts move into the second quarter of the school year, many of these vacancies still exist. We cannot afford to take comfort in reports that enrollment in schools of education across the country are declining as well and that teacher shortages are a national phenomena. Yes, North Carolina is not alone; however, our educational and government leaders must focus their attention on making policy and legislative decisions that remedy this situation in our state.

North Carolina's public schools of education produce only about one-third of the teachers needed to staff the classrooms across the state. More than 50% of North Carolina's teachers were educated in other states or entered the profession through alternative channels. Of the teachers employed in North Carolina's public schools in 2013-14, only 36 percent were prepared by University of North Carolina (UNC) system institutions; 13 percent were prepared by North Carolina private and independent colleges and universities; 29 percent came from out-of-state institutions; 15 percent were alternative entry teachers; and 0.50 percent entered through Teach For America. A [report](#) prepared by the Education Policy Initiative of North Carolina demonstrated that, in general, teachers who graduated from UNC system schools were more effective than teachers who graduated from out-of-state institutions and teachers who entered through an alternative path. This finding presents a compelling case for the need for our state's public schools of education to graduate more licensed teachers.

Unfortunately, fewer and fewer young people in North Carolina are choosing to pursue a career in K-12 education. From 2010 to 2014, enrollment in schools of education in the North Carolina university system decreased by 26% at the undergraduate level and 30% in graduate schools. Of those graduates who do become certified teachers in North Carolina, an increasing number are choosing to leave the state or the profession. In 2010-11, 3735 North Carolina teachers resigned for personal reasons. Four years later, in 2014-15, 5,681 teachers resigned for personal reasons, a 52% increase in four years. In 2014-15 more than 1,000 teachers resigned to accept teaching positions in another state, and 1209 (up from 1011 in 2013-14) resigned due to dissatisfaction with teaching and/or to make a career change. Statewide, the turnover rate in 2014-15 was 14.84%, a 33% increase since 2010-11. Turnover was particularly acute in the Northeast region, where it increased from 11.57% in 2010-11 to 17.41% in 2014-15. Turnover in the North Central region increased during this same period from 12.08% to 15.96%.

What's Driving the Teacher Shortage?

Historically, teaching was a respected profession that offered non-monetary satisfaction derived from helping our youth to develop into educated adults and well-rounded members of society. Public schools have not offered very competitive salaries; however, a teaching career provided a fairly high level of stability. Salary increases, though modest, were somewhat predictable, tenure provided a level of security, fringe benefits were better than many private sector jobs, and in North Carolina retired teachers could look forward to a stable pension and free health insurance. In 2008, prior to the Great Recession, North Carolina's teachers' salaries stood at the national average.

Today in North Carolina the picture has changed quite dramatically:

- **The stability and predictability of a career in education and the accompanying benefits have been significantly diminished.**
 - The General Assembly has ceased granting tenure to teachers.
 - Teachers in schools designated as failing could lose their jobs, regardless of their effectiveness, if they have one standard below proficient on their annual evaluation.
 - Current employees and retirees must pay supplements for the better health insurance plans.
 - The media has reported that leadership in the General Assembly has discussed changing the State Retirement Plan to a 401(K) plan and not providing health insurance after retirement to future state employees.

- **North Carolina's compensation for teachers and school administrators has plummeted relative to national trends.**
 - North Carolina's average teacher salary has decreased from 25th in the nation in 2008 to 46th in 2013. Over the past 10 years, North Carolina's teacher salary increases have been the lowest of any state in the nation.
 - Although the General Assembly has made a concerted effort to raise starting salaries over the past two years, starting salaries are still well below the national average. Three years ago, in 2012-13, the average beginning teacher salary in the United States was \$36,141, more than \$1,000 higher than the beginning salary for NC teachers in 2015-16 (newer starting salary comparisons could not be located). North Carolina's teacher salaries remain uncompetitive with most states and the \$50,000 cap on salaries is lower than the national average teacher salary.
 - The General Assembly has provided almost no Cost-of-Living (COLA) salary increases for state employees since 2008.
 - Instead of providing salary increases in 2015-16, state employees received a modest one-time bonus.
 - The General Assembly eliminated stipends in the future for advanced degrees (grandfathering those who already had received degrees or who had begun taking graduate courses toward a degree).
 - In 2014 the General Assembly eliminated longevity pay for all school district employees paid on licensed scales (teachers and student services/support personnel such as counselors, media specialists, etc.) while retaining it for all other state and school district employees.
 - Annual step increases have been replaced with 5-year bands. In the absence of COLA increases, this means that a teacher's salary is frozen for four out of every five years.
- **The climate for teachers and support for public education has declined.**
 - Wallet Hub, which considers a myriad of factors in its analysis, recently rated North Carolina the 2nd worst state in the nation, behind only West Virginia, in which to be a teacher.
 - In 2013-14 North Carolina's per-pupil spending ranked 47th in the nation, behind Virginia (21), South Carolina (35), Georgia (36), and Tennessee (41).
 - In 2012, 4.6 percent of the teachers responded on the Teacher Working Conditions survey that they planned to leave education entirely. Only two years later, the percentage increased by 60 percent to 7.4 percent.
 - Programs that support the teaching profession -- Teaching Fellows, NC Teacher Academy, and the NC Center for the Advancement of Teaching --

as well as state funding for professional development have been reduced or eliminated.

- Teachers are faced with uncertainty about the impact of Standard 6 on their evaluations and their opportunity to continue to be licensed to teach.
- The assigning of letter grades to schools is of questionable validity and is demoralizing and perceived by some as a deliberate attempt to portray public schools as failing.
- The General Assembly's increasing support for charter schools, virtual charter schools, and opportunity scholarships, as well as its lack of oversight of homeschooling, may be perceived as a lack of commitment to our traditional PK-12 public school system.
- **At the same time, requirements for entering the teaching profession and becoming certified in North Carolina are being increased, thereby reducing the future teaching pool.**
 - In-state candidates for an elementary teacher license now need to pass three Pearson tests, instead of two. For most common Exceptional Children's licensure areas (General Curriculum), candidates must pass three Pearson tests and one Praxis II test instead of the two previously required tests. The rushed implementation of these new requirements has resulted in students graduating from schools of education in North Carolina who have not yet passed the required tests and, therefore, are not fully licensed.
 - Out-of-state candidates for elementary and EC positions must meet these new North Carolina requirements prior to being employed in North Carolina. This has made it more difficult to recruit teachers from other states, particularly, in these two areas.
 - Although the State Board of Education includes the term 'reciprocity' in its policy, true reciprocity does not exist. North Carolina does not accept the elementary licenses or special education licenses issued by other states, although they are issued, in most instances, on the basis of completion of a state's approved teacher education program and are deemed 'highly qualified' by that state.
 - Several districts have employed out-of-state candidates as long term substitutes to teach in understaffed classrooms. These are fully licensed, highly qualified teachers in their home states who have completed approved teacher education programs. Districts are working with them to take and pass Pearson and/or Praxis II tests as needed for their licensure areas. Not only is it unfair for these teachers to be compensated at the substitute rate, but it is likely

that these teachers will continue to look for other employment opportunities.

- Out-of-state programs hold regional accreditation through the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (www.chea.org), a requirement of State Board of Education policy as a foundation of licensure. Most programs are also typically accredited through NCATE/CAEP so they have met national standards. Why can't North Carolina establish a more inclusive reciprocity program to remove the barriers that prevent or discourage these teachers from being employed in North Carolina?
- Legislation passed in the past session has increased the required GPA for admission to a school of education from 2.5 to 2.7. This potentially excludes candidates who are perfectly capable of becoming effective teachers. Why prevent them from becoming licensed as teachers and competing in the job market?

Recommendations to Address the Growing Teaching Shortage

Clearly, there is much work to be done if we are to head off a growing teacher shortage in North Carolina. Basically, we need to (1) increase the pool of people who want to and are eligible to teach in North Carolina, (2) provide teachers with the necessary supports and resources to enhance their job satisfaction and effectiveness in the classroom, and (3) provide teachers with incentives and desirable working conditions that are sufficient to retain them in North Carolina's public schools.

Increase the pool of people who want to teach in North Carolina's public schools

Although all of us want to see highly qualified and effective teachers in every classroom, making it more difficult to become a teacher in North Carolina at a time when the supply is insufficient is counterproductive and unsustainable. In too many cases, districts are having to place substitute teachers into classrooms for which no certified teachers are available. The new Pearson testing requirements in the areas of reading and math for elementary and special education teachers are discouraging and/or preventing certified teachers from other states from teaching in North Carolina. The cost of this additional testing ranges from \$310 (minimum for elementary education candidates if all tests are taken in one session) to \$511 (special education-general curriculum candidates if tests are taken in more than one session) and, of course, increases if the applicant needs to be re-tested. Furthermore, it is our understanding that the State Board of Education may consider raising the cut score for next year, making it even more difficult for teachers, both in-state or out-of-state, to be licensed to teach in North Carolina. Similarly, now is not the time to raise entrance test score or GPA requirements for those who want to

enroll in our state's schools of education. Raising entrance and licensing requirements at a time when there are not enough certified teacher applicants only worsens the problem and often results in unqualified teachers substituting on a long-term basis. In this time of scarcity, we recommend that policies be followed that expand the pool of prospective teachers in North Carolina, which will allow school districts to be more selective and to minimize the number of teacher vacancies.

We also encourage the General Assembly to consider other legislative changes that would expand the teacher applicant pool. Could the requirement for retirees to sit out for 6 months prior to being reemployed be reduced to a shorter time period if they return to a teaching position? Could traditional public schools be given some of the latitude that charter schools have for hiring a certain percentage of unlicensed teachers?

In addition to removing barriers for those who want to teach, we need to institute incentives to attract prospective teachers. A program along the lines of the Teaching Fellows program should be initiated, perhaps, with incentives for graduates to teach in areas of the state or disciplines that are experiencing teacher shortages. In addition, college loans, which burden so many college graduates today, could be partially paid off for those who pursue a career in teaching or at least for those who serve in hard-to-fill teaching positions.

Provide teachers with the necessary supports and resources to enhance their job satisfaction and effectiveness in the classroom

In no profession other than education does a new employee come to their workplace and, on the first day of work, is expected to perform on his or her own with little or no supervision at the same standard as other veteran staff. Several years ago North Carolina had a fairly strong mentoring program for new teachers, but funding for this support system has been eliminated. New teachers need some type of support system, whether it be through formal mentoring or differentiated staffing or assignments. Beginning teachers also need closer monitoring, coaching, and counseling than an over-extended principal usually can provide.

The list of other attributes that would improve teachers' working conditions is long:

- the necessary personnel and non-personnel resources to meet students' needs
- an atmosphere and structure that supports professional collaboration within the school day
- a reasonable degree of latitude for teachers to make professional decisions about how to teach

- a reduction in the amount of time allocated to and consequences for high stakes testing
- well prepared and effective school leaders who share leadership responsibilities with their teachers
- a safe, healthy, and comfortable working environment
- the public's respect for teaching as a profession and appreciation for the challenges that public school teachers face

Provide teachers with financial incentives that are sufficient to attract and retain them in North Carolina's public schools

Although the General Assembly has made some significant improvements in the salaries of teachers with no or little teaching experience, the salary scale remains woefully inadequate by any measure. More funding needs to be directed to teacher compensation. That said, there are many viable factors, in addition to years of experience and graduate degrees, for how additional funds might be used to enhance teachers' compensation. We look favorably upon those that differentiate among teachers based upon job responsibilities and/or hard to fill areas, but are skeptical of pay-for-performance plans that have a long history of failure. We also need a compensation system that will entice some of our best teachers to continue to work directly with students while assuming a leadership role within the school.

The General Assembly should recognize that state employees traditionally have worked for salaries that are not competitive with the private sector in exchange for the benefits of sound and secure health insurance and pension plans. Teachers are more likely to stay the course with a career in education if they know that they will receive these benefits when their career comes to a close. The General Assembly should provide assurances to this effect rather than interjecting uncertainty over what the future holds for those entering the teaching profession.

One note of caution that we'd like to add is in response to a legislator recently stating that county commissioners need to step up to enhance teacher salaries. Clearly, there are some counties that are in a position to contribute more; however, most of these counties already have the highest salaries in the state. There are many low wealth counties that can contribute only a small amount for local teacher supplements due to a low tax base. If county commissioners are expected to address the problem of low teacher salaries in North Carolina, unquestionably, the significant discrepancies that already exist across districts will grow even wider and the migration of teachers from low to high wealth districts will increase. To illustrate the discrepancies, in the Central Carolina RESA in 2014-15, we had 4 of the 5 districts with the highest average teacher

supplements in the state ranging from \$5197 to \$6892 and 3 of the 25 districts with the lowest average teacher supplements, ranging from \$0 to \$1000. Of course, North Carolina's constitution makes it very clear that it is the state's, not the county's, responsibility to provide the funds to operate our public schools. Local supplements have become necessary because of the inadequacy of the state salary schedule.

Conclusion

The teacher shortage that districts experienced this year is only the tip of the iceberg. It's a national phenomena, which makes it all the more critical that North Carolina, as a growing state, position itself to retain recent graduates from their own schools of education and to attract a large pool of certified teachers from other states. Once the pool is expanded, local school districts will be in a position to select the best teachers for their students. Policies and legislation that expand the teacher applicant pool need to take precedence over those that narrow the pool by raising standards.

It feels to teachers and others that public education in North Carolina is under attack and that there is an agenda to dismantle the public education system as we know it. If this is not the case, then the Governor and General Assembly need to pass and enact legislation and approve budgets that will improve learning environments for students, working conditions for teachers, and compensation systems for all public school educators across the state.

Note: Much of the data cited in this position paper come from a report prepared by Kevin Bastian, Education Policy Initiative at Carolina, UNC at Chapel Hill for Think NC First: "[More than the National Average: Rebuilding an Infrastructure to Advance Teaching in North Carolina.](#)"